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### REPORT OF COMMISSIONER OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

*(Continued.)*

#### III.

##### I. Defects in the laws relating to Public Schools as they were.

In connection with the principal defects of the laws relating to Public Schools, as shown in their practical workings, I will point out briefly the provisions in the new act by which it is hoped these defects will be obviated or supplied.

1. The want of a systematic digest of the existing acts of Assembly, both general and special, with such alterations and additions, especially in reference to the organization of school districts, as would dispense with all special legislation in future, and embrace within itself clear and precise directions for carrying all its own details into effect; and the whole separated into general divisions, each embracing, under a comprehensive and expressive head, all the law on one particular branch of the subject.

The law respecting public schools was found scattered through upwards of forty acts of a general or special nature; and in all that relates to the powers and duties of school districts, was so imperfect as to preclude any decisive action on the part of the inhabitants of any district, towards the improvement of their schools or school-houses, without some special legislation in their favor. The new act is so framed as to render any reference to a particular part a matter of great facility; and occupies less space than the special acts relating to the building of school-houses alone, passed since 1839.

2. The restriction placed upon the towns as to the amount of money to be raised by taxation for school purposes, and upon the

power to vote a moderate compensation, if it should be necessary or thought advisable, to secure the services of able and faithful school committees, or at least of one such committee-man in a town, for the discharge of duties which require intelligence, skill, fidelity, time, and, not unfrequently, some pecuniary sacrifice.

This restriction is now removed, and each town not only decides for itself the extent to which the power of taxation for school purposes shall be carried beyond the sum necessary to secure its proportionate share of the State appropriation, but is also at liberty to provide for the faithful application of these funds, and the vigilant and responsible supervision of the schools—the very life of any system—by voting a moderate compensation to one or more of the committee entrusted with these duties. Under any system of public schools, the duties of supervision are numerous, and under a system which aims to reach the highest standard of public education, their faithful performance requires reflection, and time—more reflection and more time, than those men who are best qualified to do the work well, can bestow gratuitously. I cannot therefore forbear to express my regret that a general provision, securing a moderate compensation for one school officer in each town, payable partly out of the town, and partly out of the State appropriation, inserted in the original draft of the School Act, was struck out in committee. It is to be hoped, that every town, or at least all the large towns, will in the outset take all the steps which may be necessary to secure the intelligent, vigilant, and constant supervision of all their schools; and among these steps, I have no hesitation in naming the appointment of a single officer, or a sub-committee of not more than two, who shall be entrusted with the executive duties of the school committee of the town, and receive a moderate compensation for the time devoted to these duties.

3. The omission of any effective check on the creation of small and weak districts, by the minute subdivision of the territory of a town, on any territorial division of a village, or compact district, where schools of different grades, or one school with different departments, according to the age and attainments of the scholars, can be established.

This omission is supplied in the existing law, by forbidding the formation of any new district with less than forty children between the ages of four and sixteen; and by arresting the further territorial subdivision of large districts, except with the approbation of the Commissioner of Public Schools, or the special action of the Assembly.

4. The absence of such conditions to the enjoyment by any town or district, of any portion of the State appropriation for the

encouragement of public schools, as would lead to the raising of the same or a larger sum by the town, district, or individuals, for the same object, and thus secure at once the necessary means, and the public and parental interest, which are required for the adequate support and vigilant supervision of public schools.

By the new Act, it is made a condition precedent to drawing the State appropriation, that the towns shall raise at least one-third as much as they respectively receive. The sum named in the original draft was the amount appropriated by the State. This sum, increased by the avails of a moderate rate-bill, or tuition, payable by the parents or guardians of the children attending school, would have placed the districts of Rhode-Island in a more favorable condition to command the services of good teachers, than those of any other state, except Massachusetts.

5. The want of such a rule or rules for distributing the funds appropriated to school purposes, as should secure to every child in the weak, as well as in the strong districts, from year to year, the opportunity of obtaining that degree of education which a school taught for the minimum period by a teacher of the standard qualification fixed by law, can impart, and at the same time promote the regular and punctual attendance at the public school, of all the children of a district or town.

This defect is now in part remedied by directing that the amount received from the State, shall be denominated "teachers' money," and shall be divided among the districts, one-half equally, and the other half according to the average daily attendance in each district, during the year next preceding; leaving each town to direct in what way any other money, either raised by tax or derived from any other source, shall be appropriated. It is to be hoped, that a sense of justice,—a large view of the whole subject, will prompt every town to aid the small districts, whenever it is expedient to continue the organization of such districts, to that extent which shall be necessary, with their own resources, to continue a public school at least eight months in the year, under a well-qualified teacher. The rule of distribution, as originally drafted, was to apportion so much of the school-money equally among the districts, as should enable every district to keep a school for the period fixed by law; and one half of the remainder, according to the average attendance during the year, and the other half, according to the amount voluntarily raised in the district, towards the wages of teachers, over the amount received from the State or town. This rule would secure an equality of school privileges for all the children of the town, up to the standard recognized by the law; and operate as a premi-

um on the punctual and regular attendance of children, and the liberality of school districts.

6. The want of any adequate provision for the training of young men and young women, for the delicate and arduous labors and responsibilities of teachers, as well as of opportunities for their subsequent and continued improvement as individual teachers, and as a profession.

Provision for the establishment of Teachers' Institutes and a Normal School, as parts of the school system, would be one of the most direct and efficient steps to supply this want in the old law. An advance has been made in the right direction, by making it the duty of the Commissioner of Public Schools to establish these means for the training and improvement of teachers, as early as the co-operation of the friends of education, or of the Legislature will enable him to do so.

7. The absence of an effectual system of inspection and supervision, by which the examination of teachers shall be made by those competent to judge of their qualifications, and the visitation of schools, by those who can conduct an examination in the different studies pursued, and suggest such improvements and modifications in the course of instruction, books, methods and discipline, as will enable the scholars and the community to derive the greatest amount of benefit from the schools.

This radical defect in the old law, so far as the examination of teachers is concerned, is remedied by making it illegal for any person to teach a school, supported in part or entirely by public money, without having been found qualified in respect to moral character, literary attainments, and ability to govern and instruct children; which shall be evidenced by a certificate signed either, 1. by the chairman of the school committee of the town, in case the examination shall have been conducted by the whole board; 2. by the sub-committee, appointed for this purpose; 3. by a county inspector, or 4. by the State Commissioner. In reference to the visitation of schools, the new law provides that the schools of a district shall be visited twice during each term of schooling, by the trustees of the district; the schools of a town, by one or more of the committee of the town, twice during each term of schooling; the schools of a county, by the inspectors appointed by the State Commissioner, and by the Commissioner himself, from time to time. To secure the utmost efficiency in these agencies of supervision, provision should have been made for a moderate compensation to each class of officers, for the time devoted to the discharge of their respective duties.

8. The want of suitable provisions for securing a uniformity of text-books in all the schools of the same town, or the same section of the State.



This defect is obviated in the new law, by making it the duty of the town committee to adopt all suitable regulations with regard to books, and of the State Commissioner to recommend the best text books, and secure as far as practicable a uniformity in the schools of the same town.

9. The absence of any provision to prevent the waste of the money of the State and the town, by being spent on a school taught in a small, badly located, unventilated, imperfectly warmed, and inconveniently constructed school-house; and to save innocent children from the discomforts, and injury, bodily, mental and moral, of such structures.

Under the new Act, school districts are clothed with all the necessary powers to secure suitable school-house accommodations, provided the plans for the same are approved by the committee of the town, or the State Commissioner; and no district can be entitled to its proportion of the school money, in the treasury of the town, unless the public school of the district has been kept in a school-house approved by the committee. In addition to these provisions, it is made the duty of the Commissioner, by special resolution, to prepare and make known plans for the location, construction and internal arrangement of school-houses, suitable for large and small districts, and for schools of different grades.

10. The want of some tribunal for the cheap, speedy, and amicable, if possible, but in all cases, final, adjustment of all controversies arising among the inhabitants, teachers, and officers of any district or town, growing out of the operation of laws relating to public schools, before such controversies have injured, if not broken up, the school, and ripened into bitter neighborhood feuds, to be transmitted from one generation to another.

In the new Act it is made the duty of the Commissioner of Public Schools to decide without appeal and without cost to the parties, all controversies and disputes which may be submitted to him for settlement and decision; and his decision in any case brought before him by any person conceiving himself aggrieved in consequence of any decision made by a school district, or the committee of any town, or by a county inspector, when approved by any judge of the Supreme Court, is made final and conclusive.

11. The want of provision for the uniform and efficient administration of all general laws in every town and district of the State, with the exercise of a liberal discretionary power, on equitable principles, in all cases which cannot be anticipated or safely provided for under a general rule; with a check upon any permanent and extensive abuse of such power by a record of

every thing done or advised under it, and frequent and full accountability to the source from which it is derived.

That part of the new Act which relates to the supervision of the State through the action of the Commissioner of Public Schools, is intended to supply this deficiency.

12. The want of any permanent and efficient provision for securing progress in the schools, and the legislation respecting them, by keeping the legislature and the people informed of all general as well as local defects and improvements, and the best means by which the former might be remedied, and the latter extended; and at the same time, an inquiring, intelligent and active interest in all that relates to the advancement of public schools, and popular education, awakened in parents, teachers, school committees, and the public generally.

As the source of all thorough and permanent improvement in the school, the district, town, state and the law, provision is made in the new Act, to keep teachers, parents, school officers, and the Legislature advised accurately and frequently of the condition of the schools, and the best plans for their improvement. Every teacher must keep a register, open at all times to parents and school officers; which will be so arranged as to embrace all the important facts in the condition of his school.

The trustees of every district must make a return annually to the school committee of the town, embracing the main facts contained in the register of the teacher, and such other particulars as they are familiar with. The school committee of each town must make to the town, an annual report of their own doings, and the condition and plans for the improvement of the schools, which, unless printed, must be read in open town meeting; and a return to the State Commissioner in matter and form as shall be prescribed by him. The county inspectors must report to the Commissioner, the results of their observation in the schools; and the Commissioner, from these sources of information, and from his own observation and experience, must submit an annual report to the Legislature.

To this summary of defects in the laws relating to public schools as they were, and of the provisions incorporated into the new Act to remedy them, I will add a brief outline of the system as at present organized, before passing to a consideration of the condition of the schools themselves, and of plans for their improvement.

II. Outline of the system of Public Schools as at present organized.

The system rests on the broad foundation of a great public interest, to the support of which the entire property of the

State contributes; in whose administration every inhabitant, who has any voice in public affairs, is recognized; and to a participation in whose benefits, every child is entitled as a right, no matter how poor or desolate that child may be.

*Organization.* 1. The State being a principal contributor to the support of the public schools, is recognized as imposing certain conditions on such towns as wish to share of its bounty, and as exercising a general supervision of such schools as may be supported to any extent out of its appropriation. 2. Towns are clothed with all the powers of taxation and supervision necessary to enable them to share in the appropriation out of the general treasury, and to establish and maintain a sufficient number of public schools of different grades, at convenient locations, for all the children residing within their respective limits, subject to the general supervision of the State. 3. School districts, or the inhabitants of territorial subdivisions of a town, when regularly constituted and authorized by a vote of the town for this purpose, have the management of the school or schools within their respective limits, subject to the general regulation of the State, and the special regulation of the town.

In every secondary or grammar school, which two or more primary school districts may by a concurrent vote establish for the older and more advanced children of such districts, the teacher must have a certificate of qualification signed by a county inspector or the State Commissioner.

*Support.* The expenses of the system are met as follows: 1. The State appropriates annually from a fund set apart for this purpose, and out of the general treasury, the sum of twenty-five thousand dollars, or about one dollar for every child between the ages of four and sixteen, for the payment of teachers' wages, in the several towns and cities. 2. Each town must raise by tax a sum equal to at least one-third of its distributive share of the state appropriation, and may raise a larger amount. The avails of the registry tax in each town, are set apart by law for the support of schools. 3. Each district must provide its own school-house, appendages and fuel, unless the same is provided by the town, and may by vote raise money by tax on the property of the district, or by rate-bills for tuition payable by the parents of the scholars, towards the compensation of teachers. 4. Every parent or guardian of children at school, must provide books, stationery, &c. unless the district or town votes to supply the same.

*Grades of Schools.* The law admits of the establishment of schools of different grades, to meet the educational wants of different districts and towns—providing however that even in

the lowest grade of schools, a teacher shall be employed qualified to teach the English language, arithmetic, penmanship, and the rudiments of geography and writing.

*Teachers.* No person can teach a public school without having a certificate—which shall be the evidence of good moral character, literary attainments, and ability to govern and instruct children—signed 1. by the chairman of the school committee, if the examination is conducted by the whole board; or 2. by the sub-committee, in case one or more of the committee are appointed for this purpose; 3. by one of the county inspectors; 4. by the Commissioner of Public Schools. A certificate signed by the chairman, or sub-committee, of the school committee of a town, is valid for one year from the date thereof, in that town; if signed by a county inspector, it is valid for two years from its date in any town in that county; and if signed by the Commissioner of Public Schools, is valid for three years in any town in the state. Any certificate can be annulled by the authority from which it emanated, or by the officer charged with a wider supervision. To enable young men and young women to qualify themselves for the office of teaching, it is made the duty of the State Commissioner to establish Teachers' Institutes, and a State Normal School, and by public addresses and personal communication with teachers, to diffuse a knowledge of existing defects, and desirable improvements in the government and instruction of schools.

*Studies, Books, &c.* All which relates to the classification of schools, course of study, books, apparatus, methods of teaching, discipline, &c. is left to the action of the towns, through the committee appointed by a majority of the legal voters, subject directly only to a few general regulations on the part of the State, intended to protect the children from immoral and unqualified teachers, and indirectly to such modifications as the State Commissioner and county inspectors can effect by recommendations and suggestions in their annual reports, and other communications on the condition and improvement of schools, which teachers, committees, districts and towns are at liberty to adopt or reject. To this should be added the influence which Teachers' Institutes and a State Normal School, when established, must necessarily exert on the classification, instruction and discipline of the schools.

*Length of School.* The shortest term that a public school can be taught, is fixed at four months; and this length of time, it is believed, the weakest district in the State can reach, through its share of the State and Town appropriation.

*Supervision.* Beginning at the lowest series of officers, there are, 1. Trustees of School Districts. Each district, when au-



thorized by the town, may elect three residents of the district, to act as trustees, and to continue in office three years; their terms of office being so adjusted that one shall be elected every year. The trustees have charge of the property of the district; call meetings of the inhabitants; provide teachers, school-room, furniture and fuel, and books for such scholars as are not supplied by their parents or guardians; visit the school twice during each term of schooling; make out all tax and rate bills; and report annually to the committee of the town, the condition of the schools, in matter and form as shall be prescribed by them. 2. Town School Committees. Each town must elect annually a committee of three, six, nine, or twelve members, to have the charge and superintendence of the public schools. The apportionment of school-money among the schools or districts; the examination and licensing of teachers; the annulling of the certificates of teachers found unqualified; the visitation of all the schools twice during each season of schooling; the making of regulations respecting the classification, attendance, books, instruction and discipline of the schools; the formation of school districts; the location of school-houses; the drawing of orders in favor of such districts, and such only as have maintained a public school for four months, under a teacher properly qualified, in a school-house approved by the committee; and the presentation of a written report, respecting their own doings, and the condition and improvement of the schools, to the town, and to the Commissioner of Public Schools,—these and other duties are devolved on this committee. In case the town is not divided into school districts, or votes to maintain the school independent of that organization, the town committee must perform all the duties of the trustees of school districts. 3. County Inspectors. Their appointment, number and tenure of office are left with the Commissioner of Public Schools, under whose instructions it is made their duty to examine teachers, and visit, inspect, and report to him respecting the schools in their respective counties. 4. State Commissioner. He is appointed by the Governor, with such salary as the Legislature may fix. His duties are to apportion the State appropriation among the several towns, and draw an order in favor of such towns as conform to the law; prepare forms and instructions for the uniform administration of the law in different towns and districts; visit schools, and, by personal communication and public addresses, call the attention of all interested, to existing defects and desirable improvements in school-houses, classification, teachers, methods, &c. in the schools; recommend text books, and assist in the establishment of school libraries; grant state certificates to teachers whom in his circuit he shall find well qualified;

establish Teachers' Institutes and a Normal School, and in every way to elevate the profession of teaching; decide all controversies which may be referred to him, and report annually to the Legislature, his own doings, and his views as to the condition and improvement of the schools, and other means of popular education.

*Libraries.* Every district may establish, by tax or otherwise, a library for the use of the district; and every town may establish and maintain a public school library, for the use of the inhabitants generally of the town, to be kept together at some convenient place, or be distributed into several parts, which may be transferred from time to time for the convenience of different districts or neighborhoods, under proper regulations.

*Modes of diffusing information.* The teacher reports daily, in his school register, to parents and trustees; the trustees, when called on, to the committee of the town; the committee of the town annually, and the county inspectors, from time to time, to the State Commissioner; and the State Commissioner annually to the Legislature, in a printed document, which is virtually a report both to the Legislature and the people.

Such, in outline, is the system of public schools now in operation. While the frame-work of the old system is substantially preserved, such new features are incorporated into it as experience had proved to be necessary to supply acknowledged defects, and to aid, invigorate and sustain what had proved to be useful. Some of these additions may require modifications, and other provisions more efficient may be needed to prompt and assist delinquent and backward towns and districts to come up to the average standard of the State. If the people and the legislature of Rhode Island are in earnest in the efforts recently put forth to do away at once and for ever the glaring inequalities in the condition and means of education which prevail in different sections of the State, and in different towns in the same section, and in different districts of the same town, they will provide for the uniform and vigorous administration of a system of public schools in every section, town and district. The experience of this State for two hundred years, during which this great interest was unrecognized and unregulated by law, proves conclusively that it cannot be safely left to be provided for by the instinct of parental duty, or by the voluntary and unaided efforts of individuals and towns. If thus left, while a few will be educated at great expense, at home or abroad, the many will have but scanty and irregular instruction; and not a few will be doomed to the condition of unlettered ignorance. Even if general provision is made by law for the education of all the children of the State, such provision to

be efficient must connect every citizen with its management, must be adapted to the local circumstances and wants of different towns and neighborhoods; and by enlisting the vigilance of tax-payers and parents, be surrounded with the largest possible amount of watchfulness, interest and affection. The schools established must be at once good and cheap,—good enough for the children of those who know what a good school is, and cheap enough to be within the reach of the poor—otherwise they can never become public or common schools, in the highest sense, where the children of all, rich and poor, the more and the less favored in outward circumstances, are welcomed to the same fountain of intellectual and moral life, and the ties and sympathies of mutual interest, friendship and dependence are nourished among the whole people, from earliest childhood. Unless this standard of excellence can be reached, or at least approached, the appropriation from the general treasury will fail in its object, and the schools maintained for two or three months in the year, under teachers young, inexperienced and unqualified, uncared for by parents, and unvisited by committees, will continue to prove in many towns, and more districts, costly and delusive nullities, satisfying the public conscience with the semblance of common schools, without removing the reproach of having persons, born on the soil of Rhode Island, unable to read and write. That the deficiencies in the schools are not exaggerated—that the conditions and elements which must exist and co-operate together before a good school can possibly exist, are not found at all in several towns, and in many districts in almost every town, and that there are modes within the reach of every town and district, authorized by the new act, by which these deficiencies can be supplied, and these conditions realized, will be seen in the following summary of the state of the public schools, and suggestions for their improvement.

#### IV.

In pursuing the practical operation of the system of public schools as it has been heretofore organized, with a view of suggesting improvement in the schools, in those details and influences, whose nice adjustment and harmonious working, are necessary to the production of the great result, the thorough, equal and universal elementary education of all the children of the State, I shall confine myself mainly to general results, and recommendations; reserving to a subsequent Report, or to a document to be appended to this, a particular account of the state and means of education in each town, with suggestions of improvement modified to the peculiar circumstances of each. The facts and suggestions presented, are the result of my own

observation and reflections, on a great variety of schools in every section of the State, for two years past, fortified or modified by the written communications of teachers and committees, from every town, in reply to circulars (Appendix 1. and 11.) addressed to them respecting facts within their own personal knowledge, and plans of improvement adapted to circumstances of which they were the most competent judges.

#### 1. Organization.

Most of the deficiencies in whole classes of schools, as well as the most glaring inequalities in the means and condition of education in different sections of the same town, and in different towns, are the direct result of the organization through which the schools are conducted. Every town in this State is divided territorially into school districts, and with the exception of four towns, the schools have heretofore been conducted by these districts, although but partially organized, or by a local committee, appointed to act for such districts. In the four instances where the schools are administered by the town in its corporate capacity, there is a much nearer approach to an equality of school privileges, a higher degree of excellence in all the constituents of good schools, and stronger evidence of progress, than in the towns where the district organization is virtually relied on. The districts as now constituted, differ from each other in territorial extent, number, occupation and pecuniary ability of the inhabitants, and more than all, in the degree of parental interest manifested in the public schools. Some districts enjoy in compactness and number of population, every facility for a gradation of schools, taught by competent teachers, through the year, and at the same time put up with one large school, for a few months in each year, because their several proportions of the state and town appropriations are insufficient to put the schools on a more liberal foundation, and the remaining districts are not willing, in town meeting, to vote a larger sum. In other districts the school is too small—the children, few in number, irregular in their attendance in inclement seasons and bad state of the roads, are doomed to all the hardships of a poor school-house, an incompetent teacher, and the want of the stimulus and excitement which springs from a large number of the same age engaged in the same pursuits. Most of these inequalities could be easily obviated, were a school system to be introduced for the first time, with an appropriation on the part of the State large enough to induce the towns to act with corresponding liberality; and most of them can now be gradually removed, and the disadvantages to some extent, at least, be remedied.

1. By the establishment of a sufficient number of schools of different grades at convenient locations, irrespective of district



lines, in all the small towns, and in every town where the majority of the voters are prepared to act liberally and efficiently on the subject. A good beginning made at any point—the fruits of but one good school, taught in a good school-house, by a good teacher, under thorough supervision, once seen in any section of the town, must inevitably be followed by the introduction of the same or greater improvements in every other. The peculiar facilities of each section will be improved, and the natural disadvantages under which any portion may labor, will be obviated by special interference in its behalf.

2. By the thorough organization of school districts, in every town where they must be continued, and especially in such towns where the majority are not prepared to act with liberality and efficiency in behalf of public schools. In such towns those districts which are prepared to act should have every facility afforded, and not be kept down to the standard of the backward districts. To enable them to do this, a general revision of school districts is desirable, for the purpose of defining their boundaries more accurately, and of adjusting the size to the altered circumstances of the population. In such a revision, the several districts into which a compact village has been heretofore divided, should be consolidated into one for the purpose of maintaining a gradation of schools; small districts should whenever practicable, be enlarged so as to embrace at least forty children of the proper school age, by adding portions of larger adjoining districts; and the very small districts should be annexed to others, where the same can be done without subjecting any of the children to an inconvenient distance. Whenever a small district has been created under peculiar circumstances, and in other cases, where a few families by spirit and liberality, supply the natural deficiencies of their position, it may be advisable to continue such for the present.

It will be the duty of the Commissioner in his addresses, circulars and reports, from time to time to call the attention of towns and districts to the manner in which their peculiar facilities can be improved, and their natural disadvantages can be obviated.

## 2. School-houses.

Under any plan of education, whether public or private, for every grade of school, whether elementary or superior, there must be a place where the school can be taught, and common sense dictates that this place should be located, constructed, and fitted up so as to promote, and not hinder, perfect, and not defeat, the work to be carried on within and about it. It should be built for children, and for children differing in age, sex, size, and studies, and therefore requiring

different accommodations; for children engaged sometimes in study and sometimes in recitation; for children whose health and success in study require that they shall be frequently, and every day, in the open air, for exercise and recreation, and at all times supplied with pure air to breathe; for children who are to occupy it in the hot days of summer, and the cold days of winter, and to occupy it for periods of time in different parts of the day, in positions which become wearisome, if not in all respects comfortable, and which may affect symmetry of form and length of life, if the construction and relative heights of the seats and desks which they occupy, are not properly attended to; for children whose manners and morals,—whose habits of order, cleanliness and punctuality,—whose temper, love of study, and of the school, are in no inconsiderable degree affected by the attractive or repulsive location and appearance, the inexpensive out-door arrangements, and the internal construction of the place where they spend or should spend a large part of the most impressive period of their lives. This place too, it should be borne in mind, is to be occupied by a teacher whose own health and daily happiness is affected by most of the various circumstances above alluded to, and whose best plans of order, classification, discipline and recitation may be utterly baffled, or greatly promoted, by the manner in which the school-house may be located, lighted, warmed, ventilated and seated.

With these general views of school-architecture, let us contrast the condition of the places where most of the public schools of the State were kept in the winter of 1843-44, as presented in an abstract of the returns of teachers and committees, corrected from notes taken during my first circuit through the several towns.

As the schools were then organized, four hundred and five school-houses were required, whereas but three hundred and twelve were provided. Of these, twenty-nine were owned by towns in their corporate capacity; one hundred and forty-seven by proprietors; and one hundred and forty-five by school districts. Of two hundred and eighty school-houses from which full returns were received, including those in Providence, twenty-five were in very good repair; sixty-two were in ordinary repair; and eighty-six were pronounced totally unfit for school purposes; sixty-five were located in the public highway, and one hundred and eighty directly on the line of the road, without any yard, or out-buildings attached; and but twenty-one had a play-ground enclosed. In over two hundred school-rooms, the average height was less than eight feet, without any opening in the ceiling, or other effectual means for ventilation; the seats and desks were calculated for more

than two pupils, arranged on two or three sides of the room, and in most instances, where the results of actual measurement was given, the highest seats were over eighteen inches from the floor, and the lowest, except in twenty-five schools, were over fourteen inches for the youngest pupils, and these seats were unprovided with backs. Two hundred and seventy schools were unfurnished with a clock, blackboard, or thermometer, and only five were provided with a scraper and mat for the feet. In view of these facts, the following summary of the condition of the school-houses was given in my report on school-houses, which is repeated here, as still applicable to many places where the public schools are now taught.

They are, almost universally, badly located, exposed to the noise, dust and danger of the highway, unattractive, if not positively repulsive in their external and internal appearance, and built at the least possible expense of material and labor.

They are too small. There was no separate entry for boys and girls appropriately fitted up; no sufficient space for the convenient seating and necessary movements of the scholars; no platform, desk, or recitation room for the teacher.

They are badly lighted. The windows were inserted on three or four sides of the room, without blinds or curtains to prevent the inconvenience and danger from cross-lights, and the excess of light falling directly on the eyes or reflected from the book, and the distracting influence of passing objects and events out of doors.

They are not properly ventilated. The purity of the atmosphere is not preserved by providing for the escape of such portions of the air as had become offensive and poisonous by the process of breathing, and by the matter which is constantly escaping from the lungs in vapor, and from the surface of the body in insensible perspiration.

They are imperfectly warmed. The rush of cold air through cracks and defects in the doors, windows, floor and plastering is not guarded against. The air which is heated is already impure from having been breathed, and made more so by noxious gases arising from the burning of floating particles of vegetable and animal matter coming in contact with the hot iron. The heat is not equally diffused, so that one portion of a school-room is frequently overheated, while another portion, especially the floor, is too cold.

They are not furnished with seats and desks, properly made and adjusted to each other, and arranged in such a manner as to promote the comfort and convenience of the scholars, and the easy supervision on the part of the teacher. The seats are too high and too long, with no suitable support for the back, especially for the younger children. The desks are too

high for the seats, and are either attached to the wall on three sides of the room, so that the faces of the scholars are turned from the teacher, and a portion of them at least are tempted constantly to look out at the windows,—or the seats are attached to the wall on opposite sides, and the scholars sit facing each other. The aisles are not so arranged that each scholar can go to and from his seat, change his position, have access to his books, attend to his own business, be seen and approached by the teacher, without incommoding any other.

They are not provided with blackboards, maps, clock, thermometer, and other apparatus and fixtures which are indispensable to a well regulated and instructed school.

They are deficient in all of those in and out-door arrangements which help to promote habits of order, and neatness, and cultivate delicacy of manners and refinement of feeling. There are no verdure, trees, shrubbery and flowers for the eye; no scrapers and mats for the feet; no hooks and shelves for cloaks and hats; no well, sink, basin and towels to secure cleanliness; and no places of retirement for children of either sex.

Such was the condition of most of the places where the public schools were kept in the winter of 1843-44, in the counties of Kent, Washington and Newport, and in not a few districts in the counties of Providence and Bristol. In some districts, an apartment in an old shop or dwelling-house was fitted up as a school-room; and in eleven towns, the school-houses, such as they were, were owned by proprietors, to whom in many instances, the districts paid in rent a larger amount than would have been the interest on the cost of a new and commodious school-house. Since the passage of the Act of January, 1844, empowering school districts to purchase, repair, build and furnish school-houses, and since public attention was called to the evils and inconvenience of the old structures, and to better plans of construction and internal arrangement, by public addresses, and the circulation of documents, (Appendix XII.) the work of renovation in this department of school improvement has gone on rapidly. If the same progress can be made for three years more, Rhode Island can show, in proportion to the number of school districts, more specimens of good houses, and fewer dilapidated, inconvenient and unhealthy structures of this kind, than any other state. To bring about thus early this great and desirable result, I can suggest nothing beyond the vigorous prosecution of the same measures which have proved so successful during the past two years.

1. The public mind in the backward districts must be aroused to an active sense of the close connection of a good school-house with a good school, by addresses, discussions, conversa-



tion and printed documents on the subject, and by the actual results of such houses in neighboring districts and towns.

2. Men of wealth and intelligence in their several neighborhoods and capitalists, in villages where they have a pecuniary interest, can continue to exert their influence in this department of improvement.

3. School committees of every town can refuse to draw orders in favor of any district which will not provide a healthy and convenient school-room for the children of the district; and to approve plans for the repairs of an old, or the construction of a new house, which are to be paid for by a tax on the property of the district, unless such plans embrace the essential features of a good school-house.

4. The Commissioner of Public Schools must continue to furnish gratuitously, plans and directions for the construction and arrangement of school-houses, and to call the attention of builders and committees to such structures as can be safely designated as models.

Districts should make regulations to preserve the school-house and appendages from injury or defacement, and authorizing the trustees to make all necessary repairs, without the formality of a special vote on the subject.

### 3. School attendance.

After an efficient organization by which public schools can be instituted, and after healthy, attractive and convenient school-houses are provided, the next step is to secure the school attendance of all children of a proper school age, of both sexes, and in every condition in life. There are differences of opinion, not only as to what is attainable, but as to what is desirable in respect to the school attendance of children; and particularly as to the age, when it should commence. The family circle and the mother, are unquestionably the school, and the teacher of God's appointment,—the first and the best, for young children. Were every home surrounded by circumstances favorable to domestic training, and had every mother the requisite leisure, taste and ability to superintend the proper training of the feelings, manners, language and opening faculties of the young, their early school attendance would not be an object of great importance. But whatever may be the fact in a few homes, and with few mothers, there can be no doubt, that in reference to many homes, so unfavorable are many surrounding circumstances,—so numerous are the temptations in the street, from the example and teaching of low bred idleness,—so incessant are the demands on the time and attention of the mother of a family, that it is safe to say that with the large majority of children, their school attendances should

commence when they are five years old. In the densely populated sections of large cities, and in all manufacturing villages, provision should be made for the attendance and appropriate care and instruction of children, two and three years younger. No one at all familiar with the deficient household arrangements and deranged machinery of domestic life, of the extreme poor, and ignorant, to say nothing of the intemperate,—of the examples of rude manners, impure and profane language, and all the vicious habits of low-bred idleness, which abound in certain sections of all populous districts, can doubt, that it is better for children to be removed as early and as long as possible from such scenes and such examples, and placed in an infant or primary school, under the care and instruction of a kind, affectionate and skillful female teacher.

The primary object in securing the early school attendance of children, is not so much their intellectual culture, as the regulation of the feelings and dispositions, the extirpation of vicious propensities, the pre-occupation of the wilderness of the young heart with the seeds and germs of moral beauty, and the formation of a lovely and virtuous character by the habitual practice of cleanliness, delicacy, refinement, good temper, gentleness, kindness, justice and truth. The failure of much of our best school education in reference to moral character, is to be attributed to the pre-occupation of the ground by idle, vicious, and immoral habits acquired at home and in the street, before the precepts, example and training of the school commenced.

Until children are ten or twelve years of age, they should be subjected to a regular, systematic and efficient school training through the year, with such vacations as the health and recreation of the teacher may require. Except during the very hot days of summer, and the most inclement weather in winter, and the established or occasional holydays, children should never require vacations on their own account. The daily exercise of the school should not in any case overtask the brain, or weary the physical strength, beyond the power of the playground and the light slumbers of childhood to restore. They should leave the school, day after day, in the radiant health and buoyant spirits which nature associates with their years, when spent in obedience to her laws.

After the age of ten or twelve, a portion of each year spent in the discharge of domestic duties at home, or in healthy labor in the field, the mill, the counting-room, or the workshop, under the direction and supervision of parents, or natural guardians, will prove of more service to the physical training of most children, and the formation of good practical habits of thought, feeling and action, than if spent over books in the

school-room; and especially, if spent in such school-rooms, and under such teachers as are now in too many districts in this and other states provided.

Every child should attend the best school, be it public or private; but other things being equal, a public school of the same grade will be found to be the best school; and if it is the best school, in all the essential features of a school, the social and indirect benefits resulting to the individual and to the community, from the early school association of all the children from the families of the poor and the rich, the more and the less favored in occupation and outward circumstances, are such, that as far as practicable, all the children of a neighborhood should attend the public school. While connected with a school, every scholar should attend regularly and punctually, from the commencement of the term to the close, and during the school hours of each day. If the children of either sex are to be withdrawn early from school, this deprivation should fall on the boys, rather than the girls; for the former can more easily supply the deficiencies of school education by improving the opportunities of self and mutual instruction which their occupation, and access to books, lectures, and the daily intercourse with educated men, afford; and the latter, by improving for a longer period the privilege of good schools, will, in the relations of mothers and teachers, do more to improve and bless society, and determine the civilization of the next and all future generations, than the male sex, can do, however well educated, without the co operation of women.

With these views as to the desirable standard of school attendance, let us see how far the state fell below it in 1844, and what are some of the means by which a nearer approach can be made in future years.

The whole number of persons over four and under sixteen years of age, the ordinary but not exclusive subjects of school education, in the different towns of the state, including the city of Providence, was about 30,000.

The whole number of persons of all ages who attended any school, public or private, any portion of the year, was 24,000. Of this number 21,000\* were enrolled as attending the public schools, and 3,000 as receiving instruction at home, or in private schools, of different grades, at periods of the year when the public schools were open. At other periods of the year the number attending private schools, taught by teachers of public schools, was much larger.

Of the 21,000 connected with the public schools during the year, 18,000 only were between the ages of four and sixteen years. One-third of the whole number enrolled, attended school so irregularly, that the average attendance of children

of all ages in the public schools, did not exceed 13,500, or less than one-half of all the children of a proper school age. The number who attended school during the whole year, allowing for vacations of ordinary length, did not exceed 5,000, including scholars in primary schools, while more than 6,000 on an average did not attend a public school three months in the year. Less than half of the whole number of scholars were girls. Of the scholars over sixteen years of age, the proportion of boys to the girls was as five to one. Of the scholars over ten years of age, the number of boys were to the girls as four to one.

These results, although obtained from different sources of information, agree substantially with those presented in the annual returns made by school committees to the Secretary of State, for the same period, and are sufficiently accurate to sustain the following conclusions.

1. Many children of a proper age did not attend any school; public or private, or receive suitable instruction at home during the year.

The whole number thus absent from any regular or systematic means of education, cannot have been less than six thousand. Of this number two thousand were under the age of eight years, and three thousand over the age of twelve. It would have been better for the health, manners and morals of most of those under eight years of age, to have been in good primary schools, such as should be engrafted upon the system of public instruction, in every large neighborhood. Of those over twelve years of age, two-thirds at least were girls, and a large proportion of the whole number, both male and female, were employed in the field, the mill, or the workshop, for the pecuniary value of their labor. Many of them have attended school in former years, but so irregularly that their school education does not amount to any useful acquaintance with even the elementary branches of reading, writing and arithmetic, as ordinarily taught. A portion of this number would have attended the public school of their district, had it not been open for only a few weeks or months, and, during that time, crowded with scholars, of every age. The necessities of some families, and the business arrangements of employers will not allow of the withdrawal of all those employed in the mills at the same time. So if the public school in the agricultural district is open in the summer only, the older boys and girls cannot attend; and if in the winter only, the younger children who live at a distance, are virtually excluded. The remedy for this part of the evil, is to keep the public school open throughout the year. For those who cannot under any circumstances attend the day school, (although it is to be regretted that they should not attend a good school for even a few months in the year, at a



period of life when they would make the most valuable acquisition in knowledge, and master effectually its difficulties,) evening schools should be established. By means of such schools, the defective education of many of the youth of our manufacturing population would be remedied, and their various trades and employments be converted into the most efficient instruments of self-culture.

Although a much larger school attendance, both of children under eight and over twelve years, would undoubtedly be secured by the opening of permanent schools, both for children under eight and ten years, and for those over twelve, still this would not wholly cure the evil, which lies down deep in the cupidity and negligence of parents, and the change which has been wrought in the habits of society by the substitution of the cheaper labor of children and females, for the more expensive labor of able bodied men. The consciences of parents must be touched,—a public conscience on this subject must be created,—a wise forethought, as to the retribution which will one day visit society for the crime of neglected childhood, and the early and extensive withdrawal of females from schools, and their employment in large masses away from home and home occupations, must be awakened among capitalists, patriots and Christians. We have not yet begun to see the beginning of the end. A large number of the females heretofore employed in mills, have had an early, New England, domestic training, before engaging in their present occupation. But where can those who have spent their lives, from the age of eight or ten to twenty-one, in the routine of a cotton mill, be trained to those intellectual and moral habits, which are essential to the management of a household, however small and humble, and upon which the happiness of every home, however poor, depends?

2. Many children, who should, and would under some circumstances, be sent to the public schools, attended exclusively, private schools of different grades.

Most of the private schools in this state have their origin in the real or supposed deficiencies of the common schools, and four-fifths of them would disappear in six months, if the public schools were thoroughly organized, and liberally sustained throughout the year. The peculiar views entertained by some parents in reference to the education of children, will always call for the establishment of a few private schools. In these, the accomplishments of education, which the great mass of society will not care to see provided for in a course of public instruction, can be given; and here too, those teachers who have new views as to methods of instruction and discipline, which cannot be carried out in schools subject to certain gen-

eral regulations, as public schools must be, will find scope for the exercise of their talents. Improvements in education would be retarded, and the standard of education would be lowered by the utter abandonment of private schools. This view of the necessity and usefulness of private schools, does not preclude my regarding the extent to which they are now patronized by the wealthy and educated families of the state, as at once the evidence of the low condition of the public schools, and the most formidable obstacle in the way of their rapid and permanent improvement. It draws off the means and the parental and public interest, which are requisite to make good public schools, and converts them, in some places, avowedly, into schools for the poor. It classifies society at the root, by assorting children according to the wealth, education and outward circumstances of their parents, into different schools; and educates children of the same neighborhood differently and unequally. These differences of culture as to manners, morals, and intellectual tastes and habits, begun in childhood, and strengthened by differences in occupation, which are determined mainly by education, open a real chasm between members of the same society, broad and deep, which equal laws and political theories cannot close. The only way to prevent the continuance, or at least to diminish the amount of this social and political evil in future, is to do away with its cause—the necessity which now exists for so many private schools, and to equalize the opportunities of education. To accomplish this to the extent which is practicable and desirable, the public schools here, must be made at once cheap and good, by the same or more efficient steps which have made them cheap and good elsewhere.

3. Many children who were enrolled as scholars in public schools, attended for so few months in the year, and will have attended for so short a period of their lives, that their school education must necessarily be very limited, superficial and incomplete.

Many children do not commence going to school for the first time, until they are six, seven or eight years of age, and not a few of this number, after attending school two, three and four months in the year, for three or four years of their lives, leave it for active employment in the field and workshop. The average length of the public schools in twenty-seven towns, in 1844, was about four months. In 255 school districts, there was but one session of less than four months in the year, leaving a vacation of eight months. In 166 districts, the public schools were open but nine weeks in the year. Upwards of 6,000 scholars attended public school less than three months; while less than two thousand children, excluding the scholars

in the public schools of Providence, and of those districts where the public schools were kept through the year, attended school eight months in the year. The general standard of attainment with scholars over eight years old, in most of the schools which I have visited, was at least three years below what it should have been, and what it would have been, if the same scholars had commenced going to school when they were five years of age. There are certain school habits, of order, attention, and application, which can be more readily acquired,—certain elementary steps in language, which can be taken more easily by a child before than after they are seven or eight years old. The standard of scholarship in the schools, fell far short, both in quantity and quality, of what it might have been, if the older children of the neighborhood were continued in the winterschools for a few years longer. They leave school just at that period of life when they would see the practical bearings of their studies, and have acquired the vigor of mind requisite to grapple with the real difficulties of science.

4. Many scholars in public schools attended so irregularly from day to day, and with such want of punctuality at the opening of each term, and of each half day's session, and withdrew prematurely before the close of the term, or of the daily session, that they derived but little benefit from the schools, and greatly impaired the usefulness, and lowered the scholarship of the public schools.

The magnitude and diversified forms and relations of the evil here stated—its deep-seatedness in the school habits of society, and the irreparable nature of the injury which it inflicts, cannot be overstated, and can with difficulty be appreciated, except by those who have devoted particular attention to the subject.

Except in districts where there is a stated period for each school term to commence, much time is lost to individuals, and the whole school, before a sufficient number of scholars have come together for the purposes of classification. In ninety-six districts, comprising in the aggregate 3,800 pupils, less than 1,000 were present during the first week, and more than that number did not join until after the close of the third week of the term. In the same districts, 460 left school three weeks before the term closed. The average length of the school term in these districts, was thirteen weeks. But not only was the nominal length of the school term curtailed in this way, but a portion was clipped, both from the opening and close of every day's session.

In fifty schools, in which these facts were carefully noted, until proper measures were taken to expose and remedy the evil, less than one-tenth of the scholars were in the school-

room within five minutes after the hour had arrived for opening the school ; less than one-half had come in at the close of twenty minutes ; and more than thirty minutes of the morning session was virtually lost to the whole school from delays or disturbances incident to tardiness on the part of a portion of the scholars,—with some of whom a want of punctuality had already become habitual. I have seldom visited a school during the first half of the morning session, without witnessing the interruption of the order, attention and exercises of the school, caused by the entrance of some delinquent scholar ; and although not to the same extent, the same interruption is repeated during the last half of the afternoon session, by the withdrawal of a larger or smaller number of scholars, on the pretence of business to be done, or distance to be traversed.

But great as are these hindrances and interruptions, and the consequent loss of money, time and privileges to individuals, the school, and the public, they are few and small, compared with those which spring from irregularity of attendance. From the want of full and accurate sources of information, in school registers accurately kept for a series of years, the magnitude of this evil cannot be expressed in any statistical statement. A summary of the returns made by school teachers to the school committee of each town, and by them to the Secretary of State, shows that in 1845, out of 22,156 nominally connected with the public schools, the average attendance was only 14,528.

But the results of my own inquiries and observations in more than one hundred schools, are still more unfavorable. In not a single instance, was the number of absentees at the time of my visit, less than one-fourth of the whole number of scholars enrolled ; in more than one-half of the schools, it amounted to more than one-third of the whole number, and in the manufacturing villages, it never fell below one-half. Whenever a minute inquiry was instituted, it almost invariably appeared that every scholar had been absent during the term ; that a majority, even of those who were most constant in their attendance, were occasionally absent ; that about one-third were habitually irregular ; and that some who were counted as members of the school, came so seldom that their attendance might be regarded as visits, were it not that such visits prove too serious an annoyance and hindrance, both to scholars and teacher, to be designated by a word, which when used in connection with schools, ought to convey something more frequent and beneficial. I have seldom listened to a class recitation, in which one or more members of the class were not excused from even attempting to recite in their turn, or in which the teacher was not mortified at a halting, blundering



answer from every fourth or fifth scholar, because of their having recently joined the school or been frequently absent. I have never been present at an examination or review of the studies of a term, or even of a previous week, in which it was not evident that whole chapters in text-books, where every chapter was a new step in the development of a subject, had never been studied,—that explanations, and even practical illustrations by the teacher, of difficult and important principles had been lost to many scholars, and that even the valuable attainments of some of the best scholars were vitiated, in consequence of occasional or frequent absence, which had been permitted or required by parents or guardians. Nor have I found this evil confined to any particular grade of schools, whether elementary or superior, private or public, although it prevails less in private than in public schools, and in good than in poor schools. The state of the school register, as to attendance, is of itself a pretty sure index of the character of a school.

This irregularity of attendance, including the want of punctuality in commencing, and closing the school term, and each half day's session, at the appointed time, prevents the early and systematic classification of a school, or defeats, in a measure, its object, when made. The difference of proficiency in the same class, between those who are regular in their attendance, and prepared by previous study for perfect recitations, and to comprehend the explanations of teachers, and those who are not thus regular and prepared, becomes as great between members of different classes. The spirit of sympathy which works so powerfully and so happily in a large class, when all are pressing forward together in pursuit of a common object, is lost. The steady advance of the whole is arrested by the halting, lagging recitations of every third or fourth member, who missed a previous lesson, or a still more important explanation by the teacher. A new class must be formed, or the same lesson must be assigned for a second and third time; the same explanation must be repeated; the laggards fall still further in the rear, and the spirit of the whole class is broken.

The individual who is thus irregular, loses that systematic training of the several faculties of his mind which a regular course of school instruction should be framed to impart. There can be no continuity in the daily process,—each faculty cannot be exercised in its appropriate study, pursued in its proper order, where there is a loss of every third or fourth recitation. He cannot make himself thoroughly master of any subject, when his knowledge of principles, as presented in text books, and explained by the teacher, is imperfect, in consequence of chasms in lessons,

and gaps in recitations. Degraded gradually from his first position, until he finds himself dragging at the heels of his class,—visited with the displeasure and punishment of the teacher, for his repeated failures, he loses that delicacy of feeling,—that sensitiveness to the good opinion of his associates and teacher, which is the motive to much noble conduct and effort in the young, and finally becomes so reckless and hardened to reproof and shame, that he can stand up unabashed, and confess his ignorance, and it may be, glory in it. A disgust to study and the school, follows this loss of self-respect; habits of truancy are acquired, and by and by he is turned out upon society, a pest and a burden,—a prepared victim of idleness, vice and crime. The consequences of irregular and unseasonable attendance, are not always so disastrous, but the business of daily life is constantly arrested and deranged by the bad habits of mental and moral discipline, which it helped to form.

To the teacher, this practice is a source of much additional labor perplexity and disappointment. His best plans for economizing his time and efforts, by acting on masses of scholars, instead of individuals, are defeated. The discipline, attention and order of exercises for the whole school are disturbed, by late attendance. His interest in the daily recitations of his classes, is dampened by the number who are absent or who are not properly prepared; and at the close of the term, and especially if there is a public examination, he is mortified that after all his efforts, he is obliged to apologize for the large number of scholars who have absented themselves from the consciousness of their own deficiencies, and for the repeated failures in those who are present. The committee is disappointed, and parents are disposed to complain; and not unfrequently the loudest complaints come from parents who tolerated, even if they did not require the occasional and frequent absence of their children, whose irregularity in various ways, has occasioned all the disappointment.

To the community, as a district, town and state, this irregular school attendance is a loss, great and irreparable, in every aspect in which it can be viewed. It is a loss or a forfeiture of money, of time, of precious privileges, and above all, of that general virtue and intelligence, which is at once the wealth, security and glory of a state. School-houses have been built and furnished at an aggregate cost of not less than two hundred thousand dollars, and the schools are maintained at an annual expense of not less than sixty thousand dollars; and yet one-third of this sum is practically thrown away, and with it a proportionate waste of the precious opportunities of early life. Were the school districts and children of a particular section of the State, to be visited exclusively with this loss, a remonstrance, loud and earnest enough to be heard and heeded, would come

up from every tax-payer and parent, against the continuance of such bad financiering, and the curse of such a withering, intellectual and moral blight. But the loss of money,—of the privileges of the school, and of the seed time of so many children, is as great and as real, although spread through every school district, and impairing and darkening in advance the aggregate intelligence and virtue of the whole people.

To remedy a state of things, so far removed from the true idea of school attendance,—so adverse to the successful operation of a system of public instruction, and so inwrought into the school habits of society, must be the work of time and of many agencies. Measures must be taken to ascertain and make known the extent of the evil,—its diversified forms and influences,—the causes which produce or aggravate it, and the remedies which have proved elsewhere successful in removing or diminishing it. All the authorities and interests recognized in the organization and administration of the school system, must be enlisted in securing a proper school attendance, without which liberal appropriations, school-houses, teachers and supervision will fail in making public schools universal blessings.

The State has already done something, and prepared the way for still more direct and efficient action on the subject, in the several towns and districts. The school law now provides that the public schools shall be maintained for at least four months in the year;—that a register of the daily attendance of every scholar in any public school, shall be kept by the teacher;—that one-half of the money appropriated by the state, shall be distributed among the school districts, according to the average daily attendance of scholars in each; and that school committees shall make all necessary regulations respecting the admission and attendance of pupils, and submit an annual report on the condition and improvement of the schools, in which so important a feature as school attendance must necessarily be discussed.

If the several towns will act out to the full circumference of the power and duty with which they are clothed, in respect to this and other matters relating to public schools, the evils of irregular and unseasonable attendance can be immediately and largely diminished. They can direct that a census of all the children between the ages of three and fifteen or sixteen years, shall be taken annually, including the name and age of each person, and the name, occupation and residence of the parents and guardians. Such a census will indicate the school wants of the town, and will be useful in determining the arrangement of school districts,—the location and size of school-houses,—the grade of school and kind of teachers required, and the proper distribution of the school money of the town. They can make provision for a sufficient number of schools, of different grades,

so as to hold out sufficient inducement for the attendance of the young, as well as the oldest children. They can determine that the schools shall be open both in the summer and winter, so as to allow of the attendance of those who could not attend, if there was but one session in the year. They can increase the inducement to punctual attendance held out in the rule of distribution established by the State, by offering a premium to be divided among the two or three districts which shall secure the largest average attendance for a specified number of months in the year. They can appoint to the office of school committee, persons of experience, intelligence, and interest in the subject, and sustain them in adopting and enforcing such regulations as they may think necessary to secure good school-houses, well-qualified teachers, and a large and punctual school attendance, in the several districts.

School districts can co-operate in this work. They can, in many instances, continue the school through the year, and in all cases vote to have two sessions in the course of the year. They can provide in all cases, healthy and attractive school-houses, so that children need not be necessarily detained from school by sickness, caused by being immersed in an unventilated and overheated atmosphere, or acquire a distaste to study and the school, in consequence of these being associated only with aching bones and other discomforts of the school-room. They can employ none but well-qualified teachers—and no teacher is well-qualified for a district school who cannot attach children to himself and the school, and interest them in their studies. They can establish a small rate of tuition, payable in advance, and thus bring to bear on parents the motive for continuing their children regularly at school, which operates so happily in most private schools. Should this expedient be adopted, for the purpose of increasing the school funds of the district, and interesting parents in the school, it should be so small as to be within reach of all, and payment should be required in advance for the whole term. They can have public meetings for the consideration of topics relating to the condition and improvement of the schools, and a public examination at the close of each school term, at which the register of attendance can be read. They can sustain the school committee of the town, and the teacher of the school, in carrying out the regulations which may have been adopted by the proper authority.

Among the subjects which should be embraced in a system of town and district regulations, are the following: (Appendix Number xv.)

1. The period of the year when the schools shall be open. This cannot be safely left to the action of school districts, for the children of a large minority are in this way frequently deprived



of the privileges of a public school. The convenience of all will be consulted by a school term in summer, and another in winter.

2. A regular time for the admission of pupils, such as the first week of the term; and the first Monday of every month, on the written permission of the trustees, and at no other time.

The arrangements of the teacher must be made in reference to those who are present, and he ought to know what the classification of his school, the length, and order of each exercise will be, for at least the month in advance, if he is to economize his time and labor.

3. A regular time for beginning the exercises of the school in the morning and afternoon, and the exclusion for the half day, of any scholar who is not in the school-room at the appointed time, or, if this should be thought too strict, admission might be given on the written or personal application of the parent in behalf of the pupil.

It will be hard for a scholar who is five or ten minutes behind the time, to find the door closed, but it is harder still for the teacher to be annoyed, and the attention of the whole school, and the exercise of a class disturbed at frequent intervals, during the first half of each session, by the late entrance of such scholars. Investigation has shown that most cases of tardiness arise out of neglect, rather than inability to leave home in season, or from the habit of loitering by the way. Experience has proved that where there is a certainty of the doors being closed at an appointed hour, that parents will shape their household arrangements, and scholars will perform their accustomed duties, so as to reach the school in season. This rule has operated well wherever it has been tried, and as might have been anticipated, the cases of exclusion are more frequent among children who live near, than those who live most remote from the school. In the winter season, the exercises might be opened fifteen minutes later.

4. A forfeiture of the privileges of the school for the next school month or term, to follow a specified number of absences (as for instance, five half days,) from school, in four successive weeks, except for personal sickness, or sickness or death in the family. The dismissal of a scholar during school hours, by the request of parents or guardians, should be regarded as an absence for the half day.

This rule has been readily acquiesced in by parents, when they have seen the necessity which called for its adoption, and been made acquainted with its beneficial operation on the school; and in all cases, they should be informed and interested, so as to extend their co-operation. They must be made to understand what is meant by the proper school attendance of children, and

the waste of time, money and precious privileges involved in even their necessary absence from school, during a certain period of their lives. They must be made to see that even a short period of each year devoted to steady, unbroken attendance, in which not a day or an hour is lost but from extreme necessity, is worth more to a child's mind, habits and education, than whole years of nominal connection with a school, interrupted by frequent absences. To secure the advantages of this punctual, and assiduous attendance, they must see the necessity of subordinating their household arrangements, and their own business and convenience, to some extent, to the hours of the school, and in inclement weather and bad state of the roads, of assisting their children in getting to school. They must see the irreparable wrong done to their own children, by encouraging a growing distaste to study and the school, by allowing their school attendance to depend on whim and caprice, or some trifling service they may render about home. They must see the flagrant injustice which is done to those children who are regular and diligent scholars, by having their recitations interrupted,—their progress arrested, and more than a proper share of the teacher's attention appropriated by scholars who are habitually late and irregular. They must understand that a public school, like every other public institution, must be subject to certain regulations for its proper management, and that no individual can claim his share in its privileges except as subject to these regulations, and under no circumstances so as to deprive others of their equal rights in the same.

5. A register or record of attendance, in which the teacher shall enter the name, age, studies, date of entrance, and each half day's absence, of each pupil, together with the name of the parent, or guardian.

To secure uniformity in the mode of carrying out these and the following regulations, and to abridge as far as possible the labor of the teacher in both, books properly prepared, and large enough to last for several years, with minute directions for their use, should be furnished to each district, by the Commissioner of Public Schools, at the expense of the State.\* Teachers can

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\* Some progress has been made in preparing a District School Register, in which the following items can be entered. 1. A Plan of the Town. 2. Names of the School Committee. 3. Regulations of the School Committee, as to attendance, classification, studies, books, &c. 4. Number, plan and description of the District. 5. Names of Trustees and other officers of the District. 6. Regulations of the District and of the Trustees. 7. Name, occupation and residence of parents or guardian of every scholar. 8. Name, age, date of entrance and withdrawal from school, each half day's attendance, or absence, and the studies pursued by each scholar. 9. The average and aggregate attendance, number of scholars in each study, the number under four and over sixteen years, &c., number of each sex, &c. 10. Length of school term in half days, days and weeks,

avail themselves in this and in some other departments of discipline and general management, of the services of the older pupils.

6. A class record, in which the teacher shall enter a classification of his school, according to the attainments of his scholars in the several studies pursued,—the presence or absence of each member of the class at recitations, and the character of each recitation made; and every scholar should be required to prepare and recite out of school hours any lesson recited by his class during his absence.

7. A weekly or monthly report to parents, containing a summary for the week or month previous, of the registers of attendance and recitation, to which might be added a column for behavior.

It would be still better if parents could be informed on the same half day, or day, of the absence of their children. This would be an effectual check on truancy. This information could be given by pupils living in the same neighborhood, personally, or by leaving a note at the home of the absentees.

8. The establishment of certain holidays on which all the schools may be dismissed, and on no other days, except by written permission of the proper committee.

These, and similar regulations, modified to suit the peculiar circumstances of each town, with exceptions in favor of districts, where peculiarities of occupation or other causes, may render a compliance with them impossible, will help to remove one of the greatest impediments to the progress of public schools. But independent of these regulations, or in co-operation with them, very much may be done by teachers. They can from time to time, by explaining the evils of irregular and

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and the number of scholars who attended one week, number who attended two weeks, number who attended three weeks, &c. 11. The name, age, date of certificate, and by whom signed, number of years' experience in this and other schools, compensation, &c. of the Teacher. 12. Date when visited, and names of official visitors. 13. Names of parents and other visitors. In addition to these items, there will be a place to enter a description of the school-house, a catalogue of the school-library, and apparatus belonging to the district, remarks by the school committees, county inspectors, and State Commissioner, with hints and suggestions for the use of the teacher. It is believed, that a book in which these and other particulars can be entered, and large enough to last for five years, can be got up, in substantial binding, and furnished to each district, so as not to cost over fifty cents.

Until something of the kind is prepared with special reference to the school districts of this State, the School Register, and School Ledger, prepared and published by O. O. Wickham, 79 Fulton Street, New York, are cordially recommended to teachers and school committees. Mr. Wickham has also for sale "School Cards," "Teacher's Tokens," "Educational Incentives," and other ingenious plans to aid the teacher, and afford encouragement to the intellectual exertions, and moral growth of pupils, and win the co-operation of parents and guardians.

unseasonable attendance, to individuals, classes, and the whole school, create a public opinion in favor of punctual and regular attendance. They can graduate the relative standing of scholars, to some extent, in reference to attendance. They can be punctual themselves, and by a strict adherence to the rules of the school, commencing at the appointed time, and never detaining the classes, without special reasons stated at the time, and if possible, without their willing acquiescence, beyond the hour for dismissal. They can always be present before the hour for opening the schools, to see that the room is swept, the fires made, and all things in order for the day's work. They can introduce from time to time, at or before the time for commencing the regular exercises, some new study or exercise, which the pupils will feel it a privilege to pursue, or share in, such as music, drawing, experiments in natural science, &c. and which they can pursue or see only by being punctual. They can early establish relations of confidence, affection and respect between themselves and their pupils, and make the school-room the home of good feeling, cheerfulness and happiness to all—the place to which they will be drawn by the ties of affection, and not avoid as a house of confinement and correction. They can keep parents constantly advised of the attendance and progress of their children, and in every possible way cultivate their acquaintance, and secure their co-operation. The earlier a right state of feeling between parents and teachers can be established,—the earlier the home and the school can be brought into their natural alliance in the promotion of a common object, the better. It is only when parents and teachers,—the home and the school perform their separate and appropriate functions with such intelligence and vigor, that the good commenced by the one, is continued and completed by the other, and the errors or deficiencies of either are mutually corrected and supplied, that the culture of the heart, the development and strengthening of the mental faculties, the systematic training to virtuous and useful habits, of the children of the community, can be completely attained.

Even when all these expedients and agencies have been resorted to, so long as there are ignorant, negligent, intemperate and vicious parents, or orphan children uncared for by the wealthy and benevolent, there will be tardy, irregular, and truant scholars, or children who will not be found connected at all with any school, and yet have no regular employment. Accustomed as many such children have been from infancy to sights and sounds of open and abandoned profligacy, trained to an utter want of self-respect, and the decencies and proprieties of life, as exhibited in dress, person, manners and language, strangers to those motives of self-improvement which